

Checklist: Caring for Children After a Disaster

In conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Beryl Cheal, an educator with Disaster Training International, New York, has developed the following checklist to help adults care for children after a disaster.

- ☐ Talk with the children about how they are feeling and listen without judgment. Let them know they can have their own feelings, which might be different than others.
- ☐ Let children take their time to figure things out and to have their feelings. Don't rush them or pretend that they don't think or feel as they do.
- ☐ Help them learn to use words that express their feelings, such as happy, sad, angry, mad and scared. Just be sure the words fit their feelings -- not yours.
- ☐ Assure fearful children that you will be there to take care of them. Reassure them many times.
- ☐ Stay together as a family as much as possible.
- ☐ Go back as soon as possible to former routines or develop new ones. Maintain a regular schedule for the children.
- ☐ Reassure children that the disaster was not their fault in any way.
- ☐ Let them have some control, such as choosing what outfit to wear or what meal to have for dinner.
- ☐ Help your children know that others love them and care about them by visiting, talking on the phone or writing to family members, friends and neighbors.
- ☐ Encourage children to give or send pictures they have drawn or things they have written.
- ☐ Re-establish contact with extended family members.
- ☐ Help your children learn to trust adults again by keeping promises, including children in planning routines and outings.
- ☐ Help your children regain faith in the future by helping them develop plans for activities that will take place later - next week, next month.
- ☐ Be sure your children get needed healthcare as soon as possible.
- ☐ Make sure the children are getting balanced meals and eating enough food and getting enough rest.
- ☐ Spend extra time with your children at bedtime. Read stories, rub their backs, listen to music, talk quietly about the day.
- ☐ If you will be away for a time, tell them where you are going and make sure you return or call at the time you say you will.
- ☐ Allow special privileges such as leaving the light on when they sleep for a period of time after the disaster.
- ☐ Limit their exposure to additional trauma, including news reports.
- ☐ Don't be afraid to "spoil" children in this period after a disaster.
- ☐ Don't give children more information than they can handle about the disaster.
- ☐ Develop positive anniversary activities to commemorate the event. These events may bring tears, but they also are a time to celebrate survival and the ability to get back to a normal life.

